

Draft
Environmental Assessment
Diversified Lodging at
Tongue River Reservoir &
Cooney Reservoir State Parks

March 2022



THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Draft Environmental Assessment MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is proposing increasing lodging opportunities at various state parks including Tongue River Reservoir State Park and Cooney Reservoir State Park (figure 1). FWP desires to offer more diversified lodging by adding up to five rental cabins and a day use shelter at Tongue River Reservoir State Park and up to eight rental cabins and a day use shelter at Cooney Reservoir State Park.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

The FWP Montana Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division (MPORD) has the authority to develop outdoor recreational resources in the state per 23-2-101 MCA.

Furthermore, state statute 23-1-110 MCA and ARM 12.6.601-606 guides public involvement and comment for the improvements at state parks and fishing access sites, which this document provides.

3. Anticipated Schedule:

Estimated Commencement Date: Summer to Fall 2022

Estimated Completion Date: Fall 2022 to Spring 2023

Current Status of Project Design (% complete):

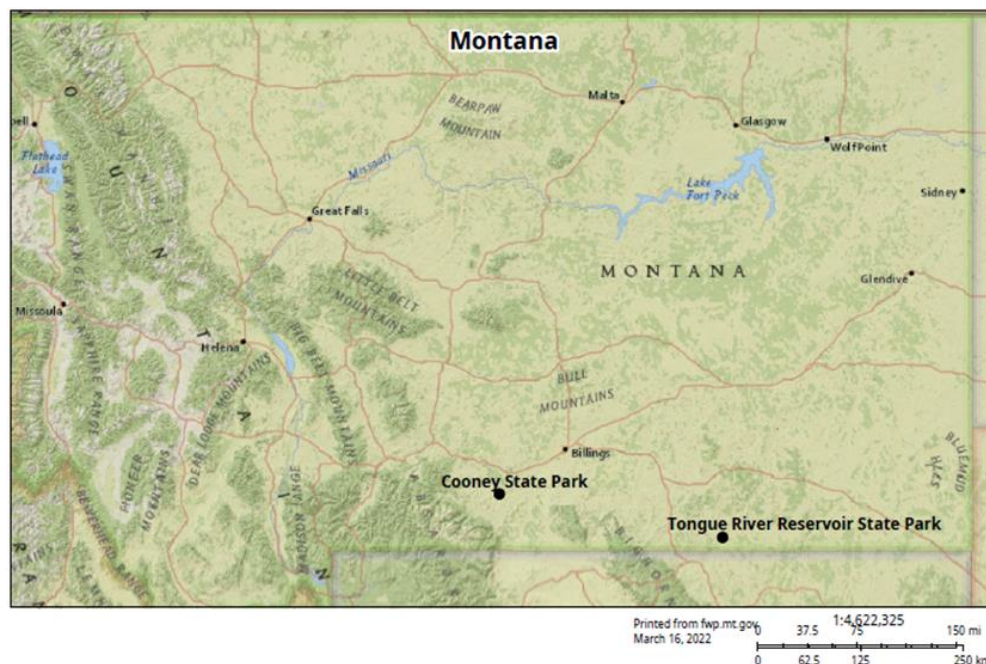


Figure 1. Statewide reference for both parks.

Location affected by proposed action (county, range, and township – included map):

Tongue River Reservoir State Park is in Big Horn County, Montana and is approximately 30 miles north of Sheridan, Wyoming off Montana state highway 314 (figure 2). The two possible locations in the park include the leased area south of Gooseneck Bay or between the campground of Pee Wee South and Pee Wee north near the shoreline (figure 3).

Big Horn County, MT - Township and Range 8S 40E section 24 or 8S 40E section 26

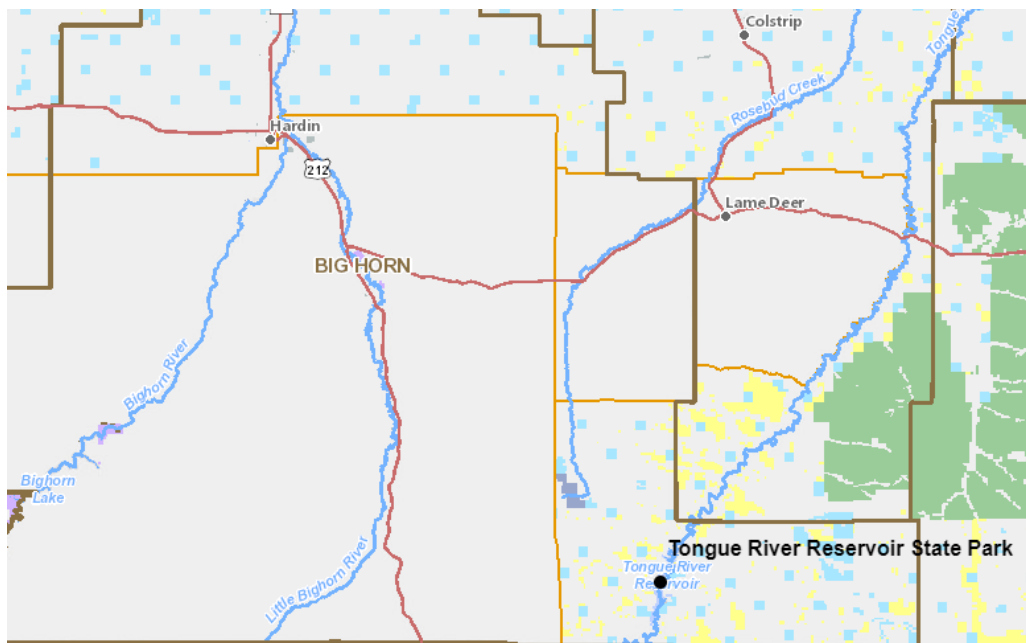


Figure 2. Tongue River Reservoir State Park area map.



Figure 3. Tongue River State Park proposed cabin locations near Gooseneck Bay or between the Pee Wee Campgrounds.

Cooney Reservoir State Park is in Carbon County, Montana and is approximately 41 miles southwest of Billings Montana and approximately 7 miles west of Hwy 212 (figure 4). The three alternatives in the Red Lodge Campground (figure 5) are on a bench adjacent to the Red Lodge entrance road and south of the south loop road adjacent to improved campsites (figure 6).

Carbon County, MT - Township 4S Range 20E Section 35



Figure 4. Cooney Reservoir State Park area map.

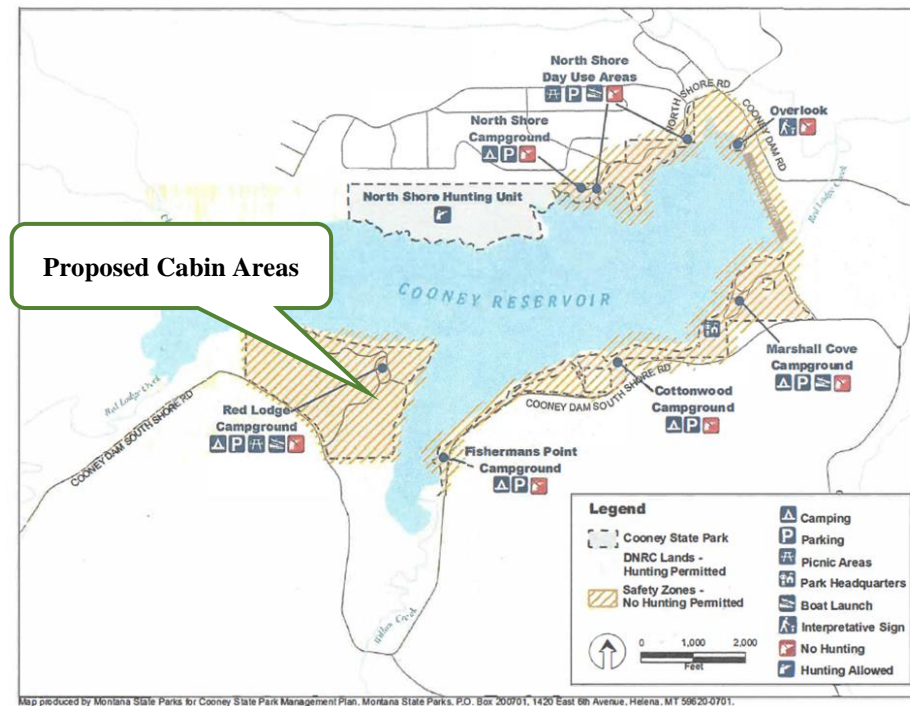


Figure 5. Cooney Reservoir State Park Red Lodge Campground location.

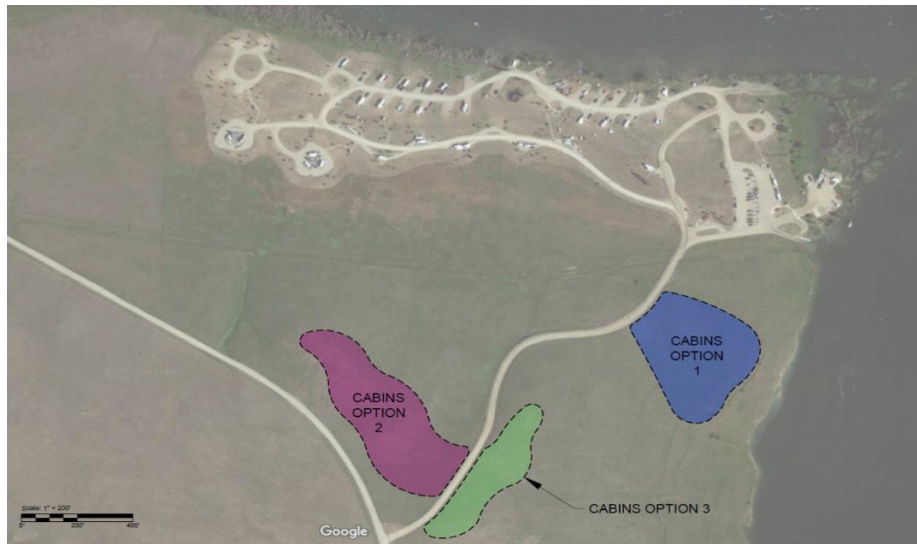


Figure 6. Cooney Reservoir State Park proposed cabin site options.

5. Project size - estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

| | <u>Acres</u> | | <u>Acres</u> |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|
| (a) Developed: | | (d) Floodplain | <u>0</u> |
| Residential | <u>0</u> | | |
| Industrial | <u>0</u> | (e) Productive: | |
| (Existing shop area) | | Irrigated cropland | <u>0</u> |
| (b) Open Space/ | <u>17</u> | Dry cropland | <u>0</u> |
| Woodlands/Recreation | | Forestry | <u>0</u> |
| (c) Wetlands/Riparian | <u>0</u> | Rangeland | <u>0</u> |
| Areas | | | |

6. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.

- (a) **Permits:** permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

| <u>Agency Name</u> | <u>Permits</u> |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Dept. of Natural Resources | Project Approval |
| State Historic Preservation Office | Cultural Assessment |
| Big Horn County, MT | Construction Permits |
| Carbon County, MT | Construction Permits |

- (b) **Funding:**

| <u>Agency Name</u> | <u>Funding Amount</u> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Fish, Wildlife & Parks | \$420,000 |

- (c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

| <u>Agency Name</u> | <u>Type of Responsibility</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Dept. of Natural Resources | Property Owner |

7. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

FWP is proposing increasing lodging opportunities at Tongue River Reservoir State Park and Cooney Reservoir State Park.

FWP desires to offer more diversified lodging for recreators by adding as many as five cabins with anticipated funding of three rental cabins at Tongue River Reservoir State Park (figure 7) and as many as eight cabins with anticipated funding of two rental cabins at Cooney Reservoir State Park (figure 8). Both parks are including group shelters in the proposed plans, however funds are not available at this time. This EA is intended to scope more cabins and day use facilities than current funding will allow at this time. Every year potential recreators inquire about staying in cabins overlooking the lake. Such cabins would enhance recreation at each reservoir and provide an alternative to visitors that do not have RVs or camping gear. Another benefit of adding cabins would be an improved revenue model that is more sustainable for FWP. Currently, only RV and tent camping are available. The cabin sites would also provide improved ADA facilities that are more accessible.

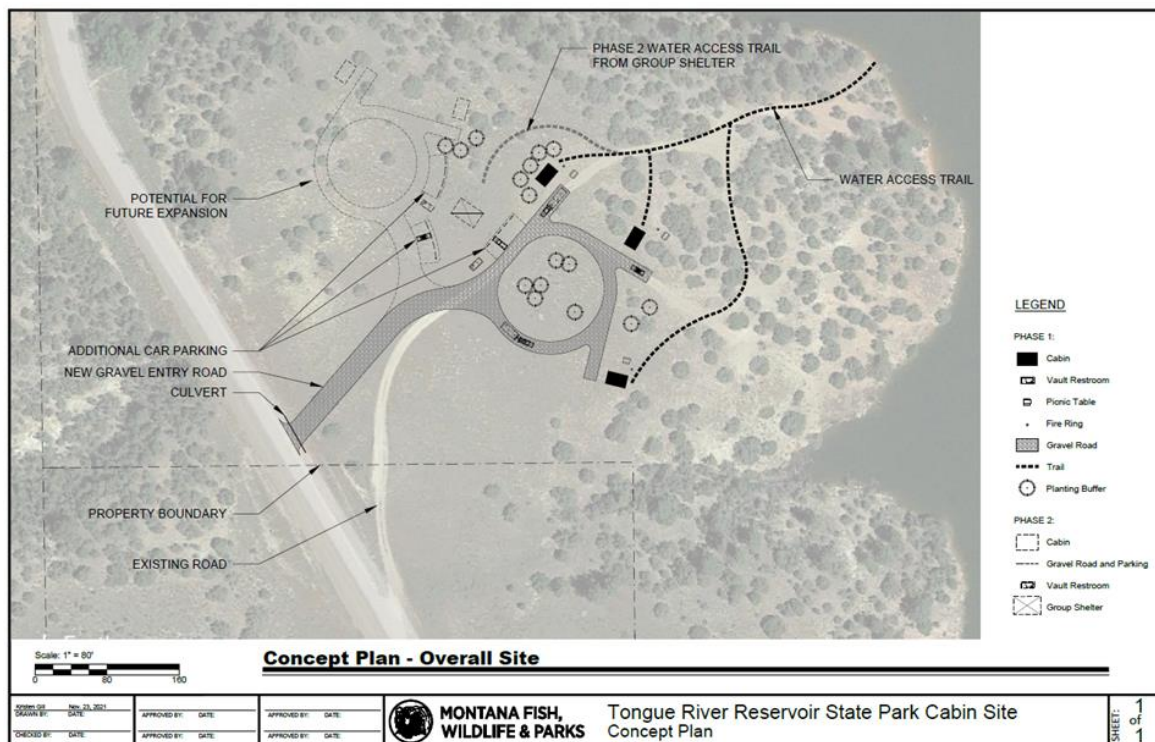


Figure 7. Tongue River Reservoir State Park conceptual cabin site development and placement for the three proposed cabins and two additional proposed cabins.

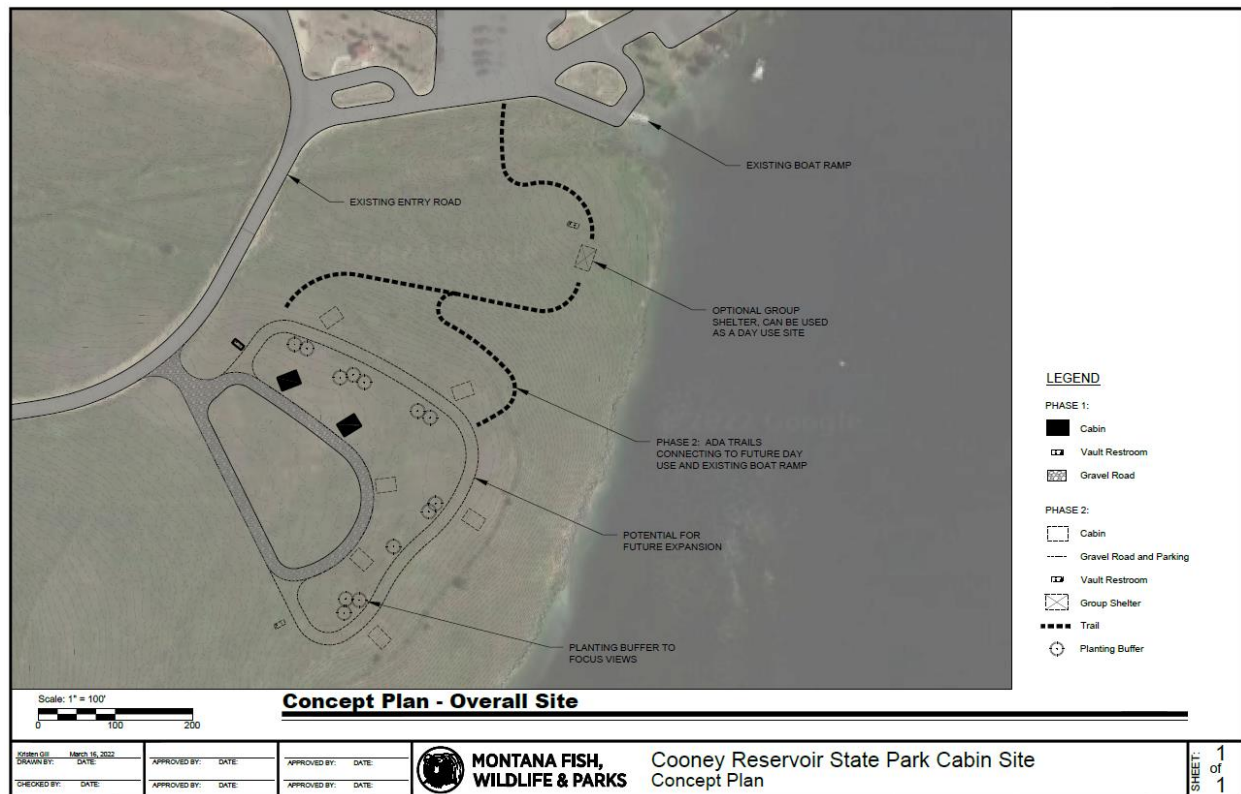


Figure 8. Cooney Reservoir State Park conceptual cabin site development and placement for the two proposed cabins and six additional proposed cabins.

The preferred cabin floorplan at **Tongue River Reservoir State Park** and **Cooney Reservoir State Park** would be a two-room model with porch that will sleep up to six with no kitchen (figure 9, photo 1). A vault restroom would be included in this project to serve cabin users at both sites. Site amenities such as fire rings and picnic tables would also be added.

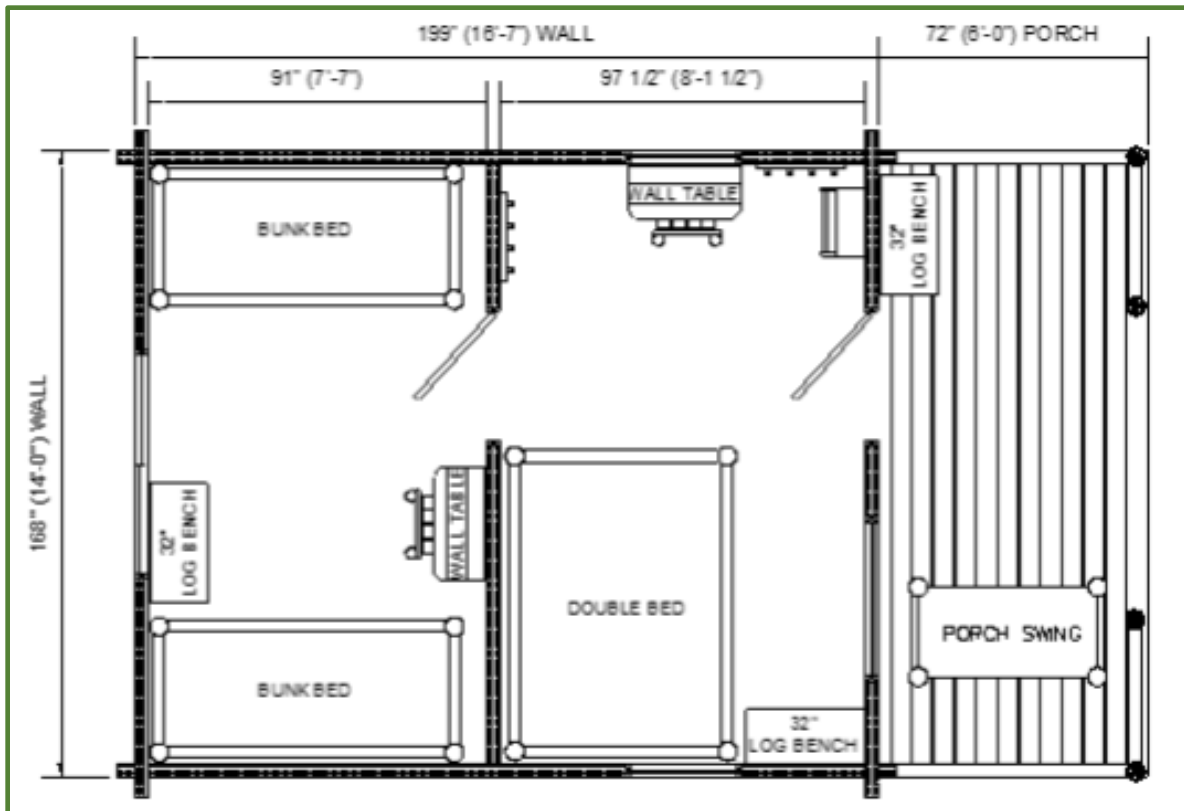


Figure 9. Floorplan of a preferred cabin.



Photo 1. Exterior example of a preferred model cabin.

The preferred site at Gooseneck Bay at Tongue River Reservoir State Park currently is natural woodland with some human impact from recreational users (photo 2). Site preparation would include minor leveling of the site, removal of a few trees, potentially planting native trees, and

excavation for installation of a standard vault restroom. Trail work for water access would also be needed. The proposed cabin view would be an overlook of the reservoir (photo 3).



Photo 2. Tongue River Reservoir State Park current condition of proposed south of Gooseneck Bay



Photo 3. Tongue River Reservoir State Park view near proposed site south of Gooseneck Bay.

The sites at Cooney Reservoir State Park are grasslands with some human impact from developing the Red Lodge Campground (photo 4 site 1, 5 site 2). Site preparation would include minimal leveling with a possible retention wall, grading of an access road, and excavation for installation of a standard vault restroom. Excavation for extension of existing water lines and installation of a hydrant, as well as for an extension of existing electrical service and meter installation would be needed.



Photo 4. Cooney Reservoir State Park cabin site option one with the reservoir in viewshed.



Photo 5. Cooney Reservoir State Park cabin Site option two.

A solar system would be needed for lights on the cabins at Tongue River Reservoir State Park. Connection to electric utilities is not recommended as the estimated cost for connection is approximately \$35,000 due to distance from transmission lines. Propane will be required for

heating during shoulder (spring/fall) season use. Tongue River Reservoir State Park cabins will need site amenities such as fire rings and picnic tables. The site is mostly flat and easily developed. Potable water is available approximately one mile from the cabin site at the Pee Wee North campground. The Tongue River Road is in good shape and will support the minimal added traffic of cabin users and will allow delivery of the cabins by semi-truck. Minor work including gravel on the access road to the cabin site will be required.

The Cooney Reservoir State Park cabins would require an extension of electrical services from an adjacent service to provide electricity at each cabin for electrical heat during shoulder season use. Vault restrooms will be included in this project to serve cabin users at both parks.

Cooney Reservoir State Park cabins will need site amenities such as fire rings and picnic tables. The site is approximately a 10-degree slope and requires leveling cabin sites, retention wall/structure and grading in an access road across the slope from Red Lodge Campground entrance road. Potable water will be extended from the adjacent campground.

9. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

No cabins would be added to either park and FWP would continue to provide RV and tent camping to visitors with their own gear. Park users would have no opportunity to rent cabins on the reservoirs.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

The preferred option is to have up to five cabins at Gooseneck Bay offered as a rustic, waterfront experience and up to eight cabins at Red Lodge Campground located on the south Red Lodge Campground hill with viewshed of Cooney Reservoir. Based on funding availability it is anticipated that this project, if approved, starts with up to three cabins at each Tongue River Reservoir State Park and up to two at Cooney Reservoir State Park. Additional cabins or lodging units and group/day use shelters may be placed in the future under the analysis of this EA. The user base would include those wanting a quiet, scenic waterfront or lakeview experience and those interested in water-based recreation including boating, tubing, and fishing. Cabins at Gooseneck Bay of Tongue River Reservoir State Park could accommodate group activities in a semi-private setting. The Cooney Reservoir State Park sites would offer a short hike to access the shoreline.

The preferred cabin floorplan is a two-room model with porch that will sleep up to six persons with no kitchen, approximately 14' by 17' in size.

10. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency: FWP, DNRC

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the **Proposed Action** including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

| 1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure? | | x | | | | |
| b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility? | | x | | | | |
| c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features? | | | x | | X | 1c. |
| d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake? | | | x | | X | 1d. |
| e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard? | | X | | | | |

1c. A vaulted latrine will need to be added to the site at Tongue River Reservoir and Cooney Reservoir State Parks which requires digging to install the 1000-gallon lined vaults. Once the vaults are installed there should be no impact to the soil. Mitigation will include reseeding/replanting of native species following installation.

1d. The cabins may include trails down to lake shoreline to allow for water access. This may have some impact on the shoreline such as cutting a trail into a bank or erosion from human activity. Mitigation may include establishing a trail to the waterway using trail SOPs. There are existing erosion control channels bladed into the hillside that are required for drainage and to prevent erosion at Cooney Reservoir State Park. The access road to cabins will need to include an adequate uphill ditch to accommodate potential runoff on the 10% slope.

| 2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT * | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).) | | x | | | | |
| b. Creation of objectionable odors? | | | x | | X | 2b |
| c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally? | | x | | | | |
| d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants? | | x | | | | |
| e. <u>For P-R/D-J projects</u> , will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regulations? (Also see 2a.) | | x | | | | |

2b. Vault latrines will need to be added to both sites to accommodate cabin users. There may be minor septic odors emitting from the vault on occasion. Proper installation of and management of the vault latrine will reduce or eliminate this issue.

| 3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity? | | x | | | | |
| b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff? | | | x | | X | 3b |
| c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows? | | x | | | | |
| d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body? | | x | | | | |
| e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding? | | x | | | | |
| f. Changes in the quality of groundwater? | | x | | | | |
| g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater? | | x | | | | |
| h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater? | | x | | | | |
| i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation? | | x | | | | |
| j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality? | | x | | | | |
| k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity? | | x | | | | |
| l. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.) | | x | | | | |
| m. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.) | | x | | | | |

3b. The cabins may include trails down to the lakes shoreline to allow for water access. This may have some impact on water drainage such as cutting a trail into a bank or erosion from human activity. Mitigation may include establishing a trail to the waterway using trail SOPs. The cabins at Cooney Reservoir State Park require an access road that will include water diversion and drainage from the hillside in its design. There is an existing mowed trail from cabin area to campground that has a turf grass surface to prevent erosion.

| 4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in? | IMPACT | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Changes in the diversity, productivity, or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)? | | x | | | | |
| b. Alteration of a plant community? | | | x | | X | 4b |
| c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species? | | x | | | | |
| d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land? | | x | | | | |
| e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds? | | x | | | | |
| f. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland? | | x | | | | |
| g. Other: | | x | | | | |

4b. During the construction of the project, some trees may be removed or added to enhance the sites for recreation. Overall, this should have a minor impact on the vegetation or the plant community. Following construction, native plants and grasses will be planted in disturbed areas.

| 5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat? | | x | | | | |
| b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species? | | x | | | | 5b |
| c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species? | | x | | | | 5c |
| d. Introduction of new species into an area? | | x | | | | |
| e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals? | | x | | | | |
| f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species? | | x | | | | 5f |
| g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)? | | x | | | | |
| h. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.) | | x | | | | |
| i. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.) | | x | | | | |

5b/c. Since construction is limited to the campground area, the impact to game and non-game species is not considered significant. Little forage and cover are available in the campgrounds. Consequently, the areas are primarily travel

zones for larger animals. During the construction activities, some species travel patterns may be altered to avoid the campground. Some smaller non-game species may be affected by the removal of trees for the new camp loop and road improvements. Overall, the impact to wildlife habitat will be minimal. Big game species are not likely to be affected in any way other than a temporary avoidance of the area during construction. Non-game species including small mammals and birds may be displaced to adjacent areas until the project is completed and reseeded areas have returned to pre-construction condition. Construction is scheduled to take place in late summer and fall to avoid any possible disturbance during the spring nesting and birthing period.

5f. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage database revealed occurrences of species that are designated a species of concern, threatened, or endangered within the park. None of the listed SOC species are anticipated to have negative impacts from the proposed actions. See Appendix B for a table of species and associated habitats.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

| 6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Increases in existing noise levels? | | | x | | | 6a |
| b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels? | | x | | | | |
| c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property? | | x | | | | |
| d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation? | | x | | | | |

6a. Currently, there is minimal use of the locations at Tongue River Reservoir and Cooney Reservoir State Parks construction will increase noise levels at both sites with the machinery involved but will not be permanent.

| 7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area? | | x | | | | |
| b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance? | | x | | | | |
| c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action? | | | x | | | 7c |
| d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences? | | x | | | | |

7c. On occasion, recreators already camp in the proposed location at Tongue River Reservoir State Park during peak season. However, the use of this area is very infrequent. The proposed sites at Cooney are open grassland within the park.

| 8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption? | | x | | | | |
| b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan? | | | x | | | 8b |
| c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard? | | x | | | | |
| d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a) | | x | | | | |

8b. Emergency plans such as fire or emergency response would need minor updates to include the proposed added cabins.

| 9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area? | | | x | | | 9a |
| b. Alteration of the social structure of a community? | | x | | | | |
| c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income? | | x | | | | |
| d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity? | | x | | | | |
| e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods? | | | x | | | 9e |

9a. By adding cabins there would be a minimal increase in traffic to the cabin sites. Both parks are busy with Cooney Reservoir State Park seeing over 263,000 visitors and Tongue River Reservoir State Park over 90,000 visitors in 2021. A 0.1% or less increase in traffic is expected.

9e. The overall effect should be minor and not affect road maintenance or traffic patterns.

| 10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify: | | x | | | | |
| b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues? | | x | | | | |
| c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications? | | | x | | | 10c |
| d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source? | | x | | | | |
| e. Define projected revenue sources | | | | | | 10e |
| f. Define projected maintenance costs. | | | | | | 10f |

10c. Cooney Reservoir State Parks cabin location requires an extension of electrical service from a meter in the campground or a metered connection from an adjacent surface mount transformer.

10e. Revenue will be generated by the rental fees of the cabins for Tongue River Reservoir and Cooney Reservoir State Parks in addition to the camping fees collected presently. If the cabins can be rented most weekends during peak season and rented during ice fishing in the winter when park use is traditionally low, the potential increase in revenue could be significant. It is projected the cabins would generate enough revenue to pay for themselves in five to six years.

10f. Maintenance of the site would include daily cleaning of the restrooms and daily removal of trash. Fire pits would need cleaning weekly or more often. There would be needed cleaning of the cabins after each use, potentially weekly or more often. The vault toilet would need to be pumped yearly and filled again with water in the spring (\$275-\$400 pumping per restroom). Repair and upkeep of the cabins and picnic tables such as yearly staining or painting, graffiti potential, etc.

| 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view? | | | x | | | 11a |
| b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood? | | x | | | | |
| c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.) | | | x | | | 11c |
| d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.) | | x | | | | |

11a, 11c. The addition of the cabins to these sites will be noticeable from the road and from the water. However, the cabins would be similar to other private houses and properties in the area and the visual impact should be minor. With the cabins, users of the lake and area may increase up to 0.1%.

| 12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in: | IMPACT | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance? | | x | | | | |
| b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values? | | x | | | | |
| c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area? | | x | | | | |
| d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.) | | x | | | | |

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

| 13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole? | IMPACT | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | Can Impact Be Mitigated | Comment Index |
| a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.) | | x | | | | |
| b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur? | | x | | | | |
| c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan? | | x | | | | |
| d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed? | | x | | | | |
| e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created? | | x | | | | |
| f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.) | | x | | | | |
| g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required. | | | | | | 13g |

13g. Permits are required by the DNRC as owners of the property. Big Horn County and Carbon County would need to permit the construction of the site. Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) would need to review and approve of the proposal.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

Final plans and specifications for the project would be developed by the state appointed engineering consultant in conjunction with FWP engineering staff. All state and federal permits would be obtained by FWP. Construction would be completed by a private contractor selected through the State's competitive bid process. Final inspection will be the responsibility of the FWP Design and Construction Bureau.

State pesticide use laws and regulations would be followed for weed control at the sites. Application records will be submitted to the Montana Department of Agriculture as required every five-years and these records will be available to state investigators upon request.

If the cultural resource inventory identifies any previously unknown historic sites in the path of the underground conduits, FWP would work with SHPO and the MPORD and cultural resource specialists to discuss alternatives to the design of the conduit system to ensure culturally sensitive areas are not disturbed.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *The Billings Gazette*, *the Sheridan Press*, *The Carbon County News* and *the Helena Independent Record*.
- One statewide press release.
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days. Written comments will be accepted until **5:00 p.m., April 20, 2022**, and can be mailed or emailed to the addresses below:

Brian Burky
FWP Region 7 Recreation Manager
Brian.Burky@mt.gov
PO Box 1630
Miles City, MT 59301
406-234-0941

Mike Ruggles
FWP Region 5 Supervisor
fwpreregion5pc@mt.gov
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105
406-247-2951

PART V. EA PREPARATION

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? NO**

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment under MEPA, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action; therefore, an EIS is not necessary, and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis in determining the significance of impacts.

- 2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

Raymond K. Schell, Tongue River Reservoir State Park Manager
Brian Burky, Region 7 Recreation Manager
Jessica Goosmann, Region 5 Maintenance Manager
Melinda Kitchens, Cooney Reservoir State Park Manager

- 3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:**

FWP Design and Construction

APPENDIX A
23-1-110 MCA
PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: 02/09/22

Person Reviewing: Brian Burky

Project Location: Tongue River Reservoir and Cooney Reservoir State Parks

Description of Proposed Work: Offer diversified lodging to the public by adding three rental cabins Tongue River Reservoir State Park and two rental cabins at Cooney Reservoir State Park.

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under 23-1-110 rules. (Please check all that apply and comment as necessary.)

- [] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments:
- [X] B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?
Comments: *Each cabin is approximately 225 square feet.*
- [] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?
Comments:
- [] D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments:
- [] E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a doublewide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments:
- [] F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?
Comments:
- [] G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?
Comments:
- [] H. Any new above ground utility lines?
Comments:

- [] I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments:
- [] J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments:

If any of the above are checked, 23-1-110 MCA rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the MEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance.

Appendix B

Species of Concern determined to be associated with each park through the Montana Natural Heritage Database for state parks.

| Taxonomy Class | Scientific_Name | Common Name | Global Rank | State Rank | Habitat requirements | Cooney RSP | Tongue RRSP |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Mammals | Lasiurus cinereus | Hoary Bat | G3G4 | S3 | Riparian and forest | | X |
| Mammals | Myotis lucifugus | Little Brown Bat | G3G4 | S3 | Generalist | | X |
| Birds | Aquila chrysaetos | Golden Eagle | G5 | S3 | Grasslands | | X |
| Birds | Ardea herodias | Great Blue Heron | G5 | S3 | Riparian forest | | X |
| Birds | Centrocercus urophasianus | Greater Sage-Grouse | G3G4 | S2 | Sagebrush | | X |
| Birds | Coccyzus americanus | Yellow-billed Cuckoo | G5 | S3B | Prairie riparian forest | | X |
| Birds | Haemorhous cassinii | Cassin's Finch | G5 | S3 | Drier conifer forest | | X |
| Birds | Lanius ludovicianus | Loggerhead Shrike | G4 | S3B | Shrubland | | X |
| Birds | Oreoscoptes montanus | Sage Thrasher | G4 | S3B | Sagebrush | | X |
| Birds | Spizella breweri | Brewer's Sparrow | G5 | S3B | Sagebrush | | X |
| Reptiles | Chelydra serpentina | Snapping Turtle | G5 | S3 | Prairie rivers and streams | | X |
| Reptiles | Lampropeltis gentilis | Western Milksnake | G5 | S2 | Rock outcrops | | X |
| Reptiles | Phrynosoma hernandesi | Greater Short-horned Lizard | G5 | S3 | Sandy / gravelly soils | | X |
| Amphibians | Anaxyrus cognatus | Great Plains Toad | G5 | S2 | Wetlands, floodplain pools | | X |
| Fish | Sander canadensis | Sauger | G5 | S2 | Large prairie rivers | | X |
| Fish | Oncorhynchus clarkii bouvieri | Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout | G5T4 | S2 | Mountain streams, rivers, lakes | X | |